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KGB led siege

Carter ignored CIA report

Hostage holders follow Soviets

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WASHINGTON—President Carter ignored evidence obtained by the CIA that the Soviet Union had been substantially involved in the takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Iran and in the seizing of American hostages there last November.

The evidence, consisting of photographs and written reports, was supplied to the CIA by French intelligence officers in Paris who had received the information from their agents in Tehran at the time the embassy was seized on Nov. 4, 1979.

Carter was briefed on the Iranian situation during a meeting of the National Security Council and other top aides at the White House on Tuesday, Nov. 6. CIA Director Stansfield Turner and his deputy director for operations presented the evidence of Soviet involvement to Carter, who chose not to make it public.

The News World reported in a copyrighted story Nov. 8, 1979, that known Soviet KGB agents had been identified in photographs of the embassy takeover and that the materials were shown to Carter at the NSC meeting. Details, however, of how the information was provided, have only recently been obtained.

While the administration has chosen not to reveal the extent of Soviet involvement in Iran, it has since made clear its frustration over failures to negotiate the release of 50 Americans still held hostage in the embassy.

The problem, according to intelligence and administration sources, is that the militants holding the hostages are not taking instruction from Ayatollah Khomeini or Iran's Revolutionary Council, but rather, are acting in response to what they perceive as the best interest of the Soviet Union.

State Department officials say that successful release of the hostages ultimately depends on how effectively the administration and the United Nations can persuade those governing Iran that the continued holding of the hostages is not in that country's best interests. To do so, however, may require the recognition of Soviet involvement—a recognition that the White House, so far, has declined to make public.

According to well-placed sources, details of the Soviet involvement were provided by French intelligence agents in Tehran. These agents were not French nationals, but Iranians on the French payroll.

According to the sources, the agents spotted known Soviet operatives—again, not Soviet nationals but Iranians or Persians—playing a leading role in the attack on the U.S. Embassy on Nov. 4.

The storming of the embassy took place around mid-day in Tehran and several hundred "students"—many of them armed—were involved. According to intelligence sources, those leading the attack were members of a Palestinian terrorist group known as the PFLP: Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The PFLP has been identified as the Soviet-backed faction of the terrorist Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) headed by Yasser Arafat.